

<b>MEETING</b>	Language Committee
<b>DATE</b>	22 October 2024
<b>TITLE</b>	Report of the Environment Department
<b>PURPOSE</b>	Present information on the Environment Department's contribution to the Language Strategy
<b>AUTHOR</b>	Dafydd Wyn Williams, Head of Environment Department

## 1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1. This report is intended to provide information to the Language Committee about the Environment Department's contribution to the Council's Language Strategy.
- 1.2. The Environment Department includes a range of services across the fields of Waste and Recycling, Transport, Planning and Public Protection.
- 1.3. The nature of these services means that staff come into contact regularly with members of the public, councillors, other Council staff, and other authorities and external partners.
- 1.4. As a Department, every effort is made to ensure that the services are provided in the customer's preferred language, and there is effort by the Department's officers to promote the use of the Welsh language through their work.
- 1.5. We will highlight in the report the work that is taking place across the Department to promote and advance the language, any plans that are afoot in the field and identify any challenges that exist.

## 2. RESPONSE TO THE COMMITTEE'S QUESTIONS

**1. What policies and plans are in place within your department to contribute to the objectives of the language strategy? Identify the priority area (early years, learning, work and service, community or research and technology)**

**Relevant policies and strategic plans / Projects in the Council plan**

**Local Development Plan**

The work of the Planning Policy Team is mainly concerned with the preparation, monitoring, review and revision of the Joint Local Development Plan (2011-26) including the preparation of Supplementary Planning Guidance. Consideration of the Welsh language has been central to the preparation of the Plan which incorporates Planning Policy PS1 which relates specifically to the Welsh language and Welsh culture.

The Supplementary Planning Guidance (maintaining and creating distinctive and sustainable communities) also contains detailed guidance on how to consider the Welsh language when dealing with applications for new development. Through this work, the Plan contributes to promoting and supporting the Welsh language in the Gwynedd Planning Authority area.

The process of preparing a new Local Development Plan (LDP), which is one of the Priorities under the Gwynedd Werdd theme in the Council's Plan 2023 – 2028, has commenced with a Delivery Agreement agreed with the Welsh Government. In preparing the new LDP, the Planning Policy Team will continue to prioritise this key area.

#### **Article 4 Direction**

The work involved in introducing an Article 4 Direction is also included in the Council Plan, as part of the Gwynedd Glyd-themed 'Second home management and short-term holiday accommodation' project. The aim of this work is to try to reverse the social inequality that exists in some of Gwynedd's communities, seeking to ensure that provision of housing (including affordable housing) is available to meet local need.

The Article 4 justification paper states: *'In relation to the Welsh language, creating sustainable communities where the Welsh language is fully immersed within communities, and providing and replicating the necessary social context for using the Welsh language as part of the normal fabric of society, is essential in order to protect and encourage the growth of the Welsh language. With the Welsh Government's commitment to reach one million Welsh speakers by 2050, the ability to have better control over the housing stock and thereby seek to ensure that there is adequate and affordable provision of housing for local people is a means of supporting this aim.'* It is hoped that there will be better control of the housing stock and thus an attempt to ensure that there is adequate and affordable provision of housing for local people to assist the aim of supporting the language to grow.

#### **Other projects and schemes**

##### **Planning, Planning Policy and Building Control**

When dealing with any planning application, decisions are made in accordance with the Joint Local Development Plan, which includes a specific Welsh language policy and Supplementary Planning Guidance which provides detailed guidance on how to implement the policy.

By acting in this way, the Planning Service contributes towards promoting the Welsh language in the area, ensuring that applications take the Welsh language into account.

During the period of April 2023 to March 2024, 1 Linguistic Assessment and 17 Linguistic Statements were received with determined applications that met the thresholds within Planning Policy PS 1. In addition, in accordance with Annex 5 of the Supplementary Planning Guidance, consideration has been given to the Welsh language for applications falling below the threshold of those requiring a formal Statement or Assessment.

Three planning applications were rejected partly due to various language issues, and 13 planning applications were granted permission with a planning condition for language mitigation measures. These included that any new name should be derived from historical, geographical or local links to the area where possible.

This ties in with the Place Name Protection project to which several Services from the Environment Department contribute, including the Planning and Building Control Service.

The Planning Service has been collaborating with the Council's Language Unit on the work of Y Gymraeg mewn Busnes. A note that raises awareness and also offers advice goes out with pre-application advice responses and an information note is also available for officers to use on planning decisions. A planning condition was introduced for any new housing developments to secure a Welsh name for the house or estate.

During 2023/24, a condition was set on 35 planning permissions which ensures a Welsh name on new businesses and over 120 new houses.

### **Landscape and Nature**

Much of the officers' work in the area of Landscape and Nature means that they work closely with the public, and facilitating access to our natural environment is an integral part of their work.

Biodiversity officers carry out regular work to encourage interest and promote nature, with nature discovery events in collaboration with partners in nature reserves. These events offer an opportunity to run activities for families introducing Welsh terms and names for creatures, plants etc.

### **Public Protection**

There are 3 Public Protection Services (Pollution and Licensing; Food and Safety and Trading Standards) that provide bilingual campaign materials, and application forms are all offered through the medium of Welsh.

Policies such as the Statement of Licensing Policy 2024 recognise the need for businesses to consider the Welsh language and factors relevant to an area's culture when applying for an alcohol licence, and when running a business.

### **Waste and Recycling**

Recycling officers undertake regular work promoting services and encouraging residents to make the most of material recycling methods. All the information and publicity material produced is bilingual, with priority to the Welsh language.

Officers attend events to promote these services and they communicate and present in Welsh unless the residents' preferred language requires them to discuss bilingually or in English.

The promotion material produced ensures the use of clear Welsh, and all the internal messages for the workforce are provided bilingually, with priority to the Welsh language.

## **Road Safety**

Road Safety officers visit schools and locations across the county educating and promoting safety in walking and cycling. These visits are conducted in person and take place through the medium of Welsh unless a member of the public's chosen language requires communication in English. The team also promote their work bilingually on websites and social media.

During the 2023/24 academic year, the team delivered face-to-face training to a total of 5,890 children and young people (538 through the Kerbcraft safety scheme, 672 on cycle training and 4,680 overall road safety).

## **2. What more needs to be addressed in the next year to raise the status of the Welsh language and ensure opportunities for people to use Welsh?**

As noted above, work on the new Local Development Plan will go ahead, full consideration will be given to the Welsh language, and that is set out within the Delivery Agreement for the Plan. Showing how consideration has been given to the Welsh language at specific stages of the process will start with the Preferred Strategy Document.

Training and language skills development and enhancement courses are highlighted in regular messages to Department staff, and efforts will continue to highlight the opportunities available in this area. This includes sharing messages with office staff, and also frontline staff, some of whom do not have access to the Council's Staff Intranet in their day-to-day work.

## **3. Has the development of technology interfered with your ability to provide opportunities to use Welsh? If applicable please provide an example. How do you ensure that the development of technology does not affect your ability to provide opportunities to use the Welsh language?**

Overall, the trend is that any external systems that are purchased are only available in English. But by working closely with the Council's Information Technology Service, we are successfully ensuring that the public-facing system is bilingual.

## **4. How do you keep a record of the people who use your service through the medium of Welsh? Can you share relevant data?**

Details of the chosen language of members of the public and key stakeholders are set out to ensure that any correspondence is provided in the language preferred by the recipient.

We always ensure that any initial correspondence is provided bilingually, with Welsh first, to try to encourage and promote the use of the language wherever possible.

## **5. What are the language skills of your staff?**

The latest figures show that 336 of Environment Department staff have completed a self-assessment or where an assessment has been completed by a manager/team leader for staff who do not have easy access to a staff intranet, namely 81.4% of Department staff.

It is good to report that an increase has been seen in the number of Department staff with a language assessment compared to the situation a year ago. Historically, many Waste Services staff did not have a language designation assessment. But thankfully there has been a positive effort to identify staff's language skills over the past year, which will continue as we look to ensure that an assessment is completed for all staff over the coming months.

The Department has also been in discussions with the Council's Language Learning and Development Officer to consider the suitability of the language levels of the waste workforce to ensure that the requirements are aligned with the responsibilities of their day-to-day jobs.

According to the latest figures, 83.6% of staff who have been assessed are meeting their job language designations. The Department has been in discussions with the Council's Welsh Language Learning and Development Officer to consider the suitability of the language levels of the waste workforce and whether the requirements marry with the day-to-day responsibilities of their posts.

However, it should be noted that just because a member of staff does not meet the language requirements does not mean they are unable to offer a Welsh language service, and the Department promotes any opportunities for staff to attend training to develop language skills or a refresher.

It is pleasing to report that a member of staff from the Recycling Team passed the Language Skills Certificate with Bangor University during the past year. In addition, officers from biodiversity and public protection have attended language refresher courses, and a member of the parking team is currently taking a Welsh language learning course.

## **6. Please provide examples of any obstacles, complaints and commendations associated with the provision and promotion of Welsh-medium services.**

As previously noted, many of the external computer systems used by Department staff tend to be English only. Unfortunately, the development costs that would ensure that the back-office elements are also bilingual are beyond the available budget, which means that the opportunity for staff to use Welsh when working on systems is curtailed. However, positive collaboration with the Information Technology Service ensures that internal systems are available in Welsh, and any aspect of the public-facing system is completely bilingual.

General Tenders: In all contracts/agreements entered into through the Sell2Wales/e-Tender Wales procurement portal, we continue to strive to ensure that the Welsh language service standard is ensured and maintained. A copy of the Council's Language Policy will be included in the tender documents, which all applicants are asked to read to ensure that they understand what the Welsh language requirements are but also that they understand the importance of Welsh to Cyngor Gwynedd. The language requirements (which reflect the Council's Language Policy) of every contract are determined according to the needs of that contract.

The 'Find a Tender Service' (FTS) tendering service: As public sector organisations are funded by taxpayers' money, it is vital that the procurement procedures is fair, transparent and offer value for money to the taxpayer. When a public sector body wants to buy any goods, works or services over a certain value ("threshold") it must advertise through FTS. FTS does not accept notifications in Welsh only, as English is the mandatory language for this publication, but we arrange bilingual notifications.

Projects / contracts: The engineering industry has a tendency to be English in nature. In order to encourage the use of Welsh during the purchasing process, we ensure that 'invitation to tender' or 'instructions to tender' documents are advertised bilingually.

**The department's report to the Language Committee in 2023:**

[Welsh Language Promotion Plan Environment Department.pdf \(llyw.cymru\)](#)